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When Murder Becomes an 'Episode'

The Soviets have murdered an American officer but have promised not to bear a grudge about it, and we have promised to work with them to prevent such "episodes." Détente is back and standing tall.

The Soviets have been intimately involved in killing scores of thousands of U.S. servicemen, but generally have used Korean and Vietnamese surrogates. Still, who will remember Army Maj. Arthur D. Nicholson Jr. a month from now? Who remembers Peter Fechter? He was shot in 1962 while trying to climb the Berlin Wall and was left, like Nicholson, to bleed, while persons eager to help were kept away at gunpoint. Today, the Wall is a state-of-the-art killing machine with automated firing devices. Behind the Wall is a U.S. Embassy. "Normalization."

The Soviet empire requires low-tech murder, too. The day after an Afghan officer led a defection from a convoy reinforced by Soviet troops, the Soviet troops arrested 40 civilians. Patrick David, a physician with *Aide Medicale Internationale*, told representatives of Helsinki Watch: "They tied them up and piled them like wood. Then they poured gasoline over them and burned them alive."

The Soviet empire is based on murder, retail as well as wholesale. A Polish priest is murdered by secret police wholly subservient to the KGB. The attack on the pope is organized by Bulgarian secret police subservient to the KGB. The Soviets watch Nicholson bleed for an hour and stalk Korean Airlines flight 007 for two hours, and what price do they pay? Pay? President Reagan said the murder made him especially eager for a summit with Gorbachev, who used Chernenko's funeral to threaten military action against an American ally, Pakistan, if it continues to aid Afghan freedom fighters.

About four hours after Nicholson was murdered, the president, breakfasting with journalists, was asked about Soviet violations of arms control agreements—violations his ad-

ministration has documented. He spoke about "language problems" and "ambiguity" leading the Soviets to a different but equally sincere "understanding" of what the agreements require. He spoke of finding "ways where we can by deed prove what our intentions are." The Soviets are in the 68th year of a murder rampage and the problem is a misunderstanding: If we can just prove our benign intentions...

In 1982 a French officer operating under

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the 1947 agreements that covered Nicholson's activities was killed when his car was run off the road by East German forces. British officers operating under the agreements have been involved in suspicious "accidents." Six days after Nicholson was shot—the day he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, within sight of the office where Secretary of State George Shultz met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin—those two men discussed having discussions to prevent such "episodes." It was "murder" one day, an "episode" the next at a State Department dissolving in pleasure because the Soviets have agreed to cooperate with us.

Will the murder interrupt, even momentarily, the talks whereby we get the Soviets to agree to allow U.S. taxpayers to subsidize, with credits, the sale of high technology to the Soviet war machine? No. So mesmerized is the administration by the arms control "process," it is too paralyzed to respond even to murder, lest a response jeopardize that "process."

Historians may conclude that it was during this administration that the United States conclusively lost the Cold War. By "lost" I mean forfeited the last chances to embody in action correct thinking about the Soviet threat. This severe judgment is justified in spite of the fact—actually, because of the fact—that this administration is wiser than its recent predecessors and probably wiser than its successors will be. It is the wisest the nation has had in a generation. Measured that way, it is commendable. Measured against the task, it is unsatisfactory.

This conclusion is compelled by things done and left undone, from the failure to use the weapon of enforced default against the Polish regime's debts to the current squandering of energy on the charade of arms control. The debacle of policy toward Poland demonstrated the degree to which a conservative administration, especially, is incapable of subordinating commerce to geopolitics. The Carteresque elevation of arms control to the rank of centerpiece in U.S.-Soviet relations demonstrates the degree to which democracies allow their wishes to control their thoughts.

One week after Nicholson bled to death, the president described the death as "cold-blooded murder." There has not been even a Soviet apology. Has the president asked for one? If not, why not? If he has asked, what price will he make the Soviets pay for refusing—for compounding cold-blooded murder with ostentatious disdain for the murdered officer's commander in chief?